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FROM USMISSION UNESCO

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SUBJECT: UNESCO REFORM: GENEVA GROUP TO TACKLE UN "COHERENCE" EXERCISE

¶1. This is a Guidance Request, see para 3.

¶2. At its July 12 meeting, the UNESCO Geneva Group of donor member states will focus on the ongoing exercise to enhance UN system-wide coherence in the areas of humanitarian assistance, the environment and development. The meeting will start with a presentation by the Director of UNESCO's Bureau of Strategic Planning. Discussion will center on two documents: a paper produced by the UNESCO Secretariat on the coherence exercise, and a February 24 2006 letter from UN Ambassadors of 13 donor states (not including the U.S.) to the three members of the panel on UN system-wide coherence. (Both documents e-mailed to IO/UNESCO Kelly Siekman and IO/S Lisa Spratt).

¶3. The U.S. Permanent Delegation to UNESCO requests guidance before July 11 on the U.S. position on the ongoing UN coherence exercise, as well as on the two documents described above.

UNESCO Secretariat on UN System-Wide Coherence

¶4. The UNESCO secretariat's paper acknowledges the need for reform of the UN system at the country level, stressing the importance of complementarity within the UN system, and thus respect for the mandates of specialized agencies. Recommending that the discussions on UN reform be broadened to include the World Bank, the paper notes that while the World Bank's expertise lies in addressing needs on a country-by-country basis, the strength of the UN (especially via its specialized agencies) lies in its sectoral expertise.

¶5. A key point of the UNESCO paper on the coherence exercise is found in para 4: "UNESCO's intellectual, ethical, and normative functions cannot be divorced from implementation and operational action." (para 4) UNESCO's eagerness to highlight its role in implementation and operational action -- which the U.S. has encouraged, in contrast to its normative functions -- is perhaps explained by para 8. This para stresses that those "best efforts will be severely constrained if UN common country programming is not fully inclusive of all UN system agencies and if donor funds were to be channelled at country level exclusively to so-called 'operational agencies'." Despite these concerns, Paras 6-7 affirm support for the Secretary-General's vision of "the need to create one UN at the country level," as well as for the principles of the Paris High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness.

¶6. The UNESCO paper concludes by outlining UNESCO's role in development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. On water resources, the paper states "UNESCO's work is not narrowly normative in this field, but is deeply engaged with practical aspects of implementation."

13 Donor States Outline UN Coherence Principles

¶7. The second attachment is a letter to the three UN coherence panel co-chairs that was signed by 13 donor nations: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK. The letter evokes five principles "to help shape a new vision for the future": Orientation towards supporting sustainable development and the achievement of the agreed international development goals, including the MDGs;

Policy and institutional coherence;

More unified presence than today at country level with one UN country team, one country representative for the whole system and one integrated, results-based plan;

Support to national priorities and processes as well as efficient and timely delivery;

Clear division of labor and effective partnerships, based on comparative advantages between the UN system, Global Funds, bilateral actors and the IFIs.

¶8. An annexed document poses questions and presents proposals on: defining the core role, structure, governance mechanisms, and funding of the UN operational system; deepening and accelerating the reform of country-level operations; mainstreaming cross-country issues (including human resources, environment and gender); and improving aid effectiveness, including via assessing implementation of the Paris Declaration. KOSS